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Remembering Ryan

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Even as he faced combat, Beaupre's thoughts concerned the welfare of others.

Remembering Ryan

Among the first casualties of the Iraq War, Ryan Beaupre '95 is remembered by his IWU friends.

By Tim Obermiller

The war in Iraq hit home on Illinois Wesleyan's campus March 20 when Ryan Beaupre — a Marine captain and graduate of the class of 1995 — became one of America's first casualties.

Beaupre (left), 30, was the pilot of the CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter that crashed in the Kuwaiti desert, killing eight British Royal Marines and three other U.S. Marines and marking the first deaths among the U.S.-led coalition forces in the war. The CH-46 was one of several choppers attempting to drop British and U.S. troops in southern Iraq near the Faw Peninsula, about nine miles from the border of Iraq, when it "flailed and fell from the sky," according to an account in the *Army Times*.

No hostile fire had been reported in the area, and mechanical failure was the suspected cause of the crash, military officials

said. The Sea Knight is a long-serving military dray whose oldest models date to the 1960s. According to the Los Angeles Times, "The advanced age of the CH-46 fleet has been a cause for concern to Marine officials, who have sought to replace the helicopter with the V-22 Osprey."

"The University community is obviously saddened by this tragic news," said Janet McNew, Illinois Wesleyan provost and acting president. "We certainly have Ryan's family and all of his many friends from Illinois Wesleyan in our thoughts."

On March 25, the University held a memorial service in Evelyn Chapel where former classmates, members of the administration and faculty, and current students remembered Beaupre as a soft-spoken man of character, compassion, and conviction.

Jack Fields '71, registrar at Illinois Wesleyan and adviser to Sigma Pi fraternity, knew Beaupre as a student and Sigma Pi fraternity officer and described him as "one of the best. He is one of the kids who really stands out in my memory."

"When I think of Ryan, I am reminded of the opening of the old Andy Griffith show where Opie is going fishing with the fishing pole in his hand," said Fields. "That is the perfect caricature of Ryan — this all-American kid with a shock of red hair and a happy gait, not that he was carefree and happy-go-lucky. He had this presence about him that made you feel good to be around him."

A native of St. Anne, Ill., a small town about 60 miles south of Chicago, Beaupre majored in accounting at the University. He was on the Dean's List and received the Growmark Outstanding Accounting Major Award in 1994. In addition to his involvement in Sigma Pi, he competed in cross country and track, and was a recruitment peer at the University's Career Center for two years. He also did volunteer work for "Home-Sweet-Home" mission, a Bloomington homeless shelter and transitional housing program.

Immediately after graduation, Beaupre was hired as an accountant at State Farm Insurance in Bloomington, where he worked for a year before joining the U.S. Marine Corps.

“I know that being a pilot was Ryan’s dream job,” said Ann Harding, assistant director of the Career Center where Beaupre worked as a student. “When I heard [the news of his death], I thought that Ryan could have been working at State Farm and been as safe as we all are. But he wouldn’t have been happy if he hadn’t pursued his dream to fly.”

Fields always saw the makings of a natural leader in the student who became a Marine captain. “He was confident but not arrogant. The calm certainty about him inspired confidence. I would think that he would have made an excellent officer. He would inspire men to follow him.”

A letter written three days prior to the helicopter crash that took his life indicates the level of commitment Beaupre felt to the cause for which he was serving. Composed with the intent of being passed on to his parents in the event of his death, his letter stated, “Realize that I died doing something that I truly love, and for a purpose greater than myself.”

The letter, reprinted in the Washington Post, shows that even as he faced combat, Beaupre’s thoughts concerned the welfare of others. “To be honest, the one thing that worries me is a lot of Iraqi people getting killed,” he wrote. “Our weapons are powerful and I don’t believe the Iraqis will last too long. I hope they simply give up or I fear many of them will die for a dictator that doesn’t care one bit about them.”

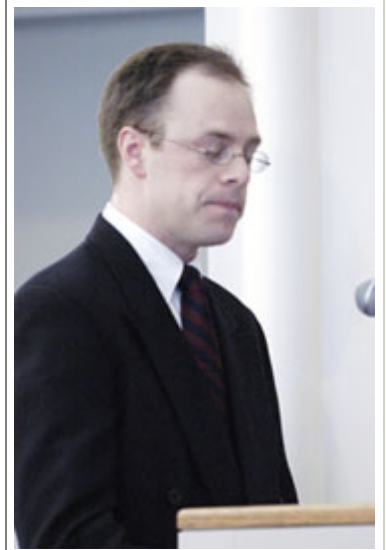
His letter concluded, “I truly feel that I’ve had a blessed life, thanks to you two.” In addition to his parents, he is survived by two sisters and a brother.

When Beaupre was buried with full military honors on April 3 in St. Anne, an overflow crowd at St. Anne Catholic Church came to pay their respects and bid farewell to a hometown hero. U.S. flags, most of them at half-staff, were flown from light poles and buildings throughout the town of 1,212. The day before, a Marine honor guard escorted Beaupre’s flag-draped coffin to a wake at St. Anne Grade School that was attended by hundreds.

On March 28, the Illinois State House of Representatives passed a resolution in honor of Beaupre and observed a moment of silence. But perhaps the most fitting tributes to the Illinois Wesleyan graduate were the memories recounted by those who knew and loved him.

In a eulogy given at the Evelyn Chapel service, Sigma Pi fraternity brother Mike Howard ’93 (shown above) remembered the comfort Beaupre provided to him during a difficult time: “One sunny spring afternoon in 1993, while Ryan and I lived together, I learned that my mother had lost her battle with breast cancer. As I told Ryan the news, he wrapped his arms around me as I wept

“Life does seem a little less complete at this moment without Ryan. God, do I miss him. But it does not end here. In fact, this is just the beginning. I am learning that every patient I treat [as a doctor], every experience I have, and every relationship I make can teach me something. It has taken me 10 years to realize what that one embrace meant. But that embrace created a legacy. Ryan, thank you. I love you, my brother.”



“Life does seem a little less complete at this moment without Ryan. God, do I miss him. But it does not end here.” — Mike Howard ’93 (shown above)



At the same service, Corey Dean '93 described Beaupre as "a Renaissance man."

"I know that being a pilot was Ryan's dream job ... He wouldn't have been happy if he hadn't pursued his dream to fly." — Ann Harding

"He was diligent and determined in whatever he did, be it accounting, flying, or, as I've heard recently, surfing," Dean said. "While he was at Illinois Wesleyan, he served the brothers in his fraternity and the student body as a whole. He helped manage the finances at the fraternity, introduced new students to campus, and even sat in the hospital with someone injured during a pickup game of basketball. The circumstance was irrelevant. You knew you could count on Beaups."

Kim Turner '95 was among the friends who wrote tributes to Beaupre on a community bulletin board posted on the University's web site. Turner said she found out about his death while attending a reunion of sorority sisters in Las Vegas. "It was horribly shocking news and a little surreal in the fact that my

previous visit to Las Vegas had been with Ryan.

"My senior year in college, Ryan, Chris Wolf ['95], and I took a road trip out to Las Vegas to visit Joe Caccitolo ['93] over short-term break," Turner explained. "I have many great memories of that trip, enhanced by Chris's video and running commentary that I have kept with me no matter how many times I have moved. That video has always been special to me, but it means so much now that I can still see Ryan laughing in the snow storm in New Mexico that delayed us, peering into an old mine shaft in the desert, standing literally at the edge of the Grand Canyon with Joe after we had spent the day with our broken-down car, and singing in the hotel room on our trip home."

Those memories, Turner said, helped her cope with her grief as she looked forward to a time when "I'll be able to better focus on the fact that I was lucky to have him in my life for the time that he was around."